



Newsletter of the Friends of Kurth Kiln

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The Kiln

Caring for our Cultural Heritage and its Natural Environment



Friends of Kurth Kiln celebrate 20 years

At our meeting on 8 June, Friends of Kurth Kiln celebrated twenty years, with friends and Parks Victoria staff. We shared morning tea and a chat, then Alfred outlined the history, activities and achievements of the group over the twenty years. (see pages 3-4)

It was a beautiful winter's day on the Queens Birthday long weekend, and the Park was busy with visitors - camping, walking, horse-riding, trail- and push-biking, and just enjoying the outdoors. Between showing off the Kiln, celebrating our anniversary, thinking back on our history and enjoying our lunchtime sausages, we didn't actually get to the 'working bee' part of our meeting!



Alfred and Ursula cutting our 20th anniversary cake, with Parks Victoria staff Ray and Simon.



"A Lovely, Peaceful Atmosphere"

This was how visitors described the 2019 Kurth Kiln Heritage Festival in April. The weather was beautiful (for the second year in a row, but we prefer not to remember the wild weather of the 2017 festival).



Visitors to the Festival included members of the Kurth family. Above, Bella, Kurth's great-granddaughter, and her mother Vicki talk to Peter McHugh, a former forester who worked in the park in the 1970s and 80s.



Reflections on the Anniversary Meeting: 8 June 2019

Alfred Klink looks back on Friends of Kurt Kiln's achievements over twenty years

The Friends of Kurth Kiln group was officially formed in June 1999. It was on the suggestion of Parks Victoria Ranger Dave Drangsholt, who tried to encourage our feeble attempts to improve the Kurth Kiln site: "As a registered Friends Group you would become so much more efficient in your work". No sooner said than done, we had our first official meeting as an incorporated Friends of Kurth Kiln group on the second Saturday in June 1999—twenty years ago.

Meinhard Holtz volunteered to become our President, a position he held with his wife Hilda until his untimely death in 2006. We were sorry to see Dave Drangsholt leave, as he retired in 2002, but our new official support from Parks Victoria Gembrook Office was Ralph Angelico who became a very active Liaison Ranger for the next 10 years.



Meinhard Holtz, President of Friends of Kurth Kiln for the first seven years.

Promoting the historic site and improving its environment were always high on our agenda:

1. Repair to the kiln itself. The collapsing flue had been replaced by Parks Victoria earlier, in 1996, but much of the reinforcing steel work was missing. A local blacksmith helped us there, and all was replaced.

2. Two of the four steel Shute Doors were missing. One was located dumped in the bush not far away. The blacksmith took it to a steel foundry and had a duplicate made of it, then fitted both to the kiln.

It was only then we discovered the possible reason why the door was dumped, because the inscription on it, makers name and date, were written upside down. Never mind, you have to look closely to be able to read it!



3. The little dam on the lake behind the kiln had collapsed, the lake



was overgrown with weeds and there was no sign of the waterwheel supposed to have been there at the time of the kiln operation.

We repaired the dam, Parks Victoria cleared out the lake. We opened the walkway to the Picnic Ground and toilets and installed post and rail fencing around the open areas.



4. Dick Cleary, a member with constructive talents, suggested we should replace the waterwheel



and offered to build a six foot one in his workshop. Everyone was willing to help. The foundation for the wheel was re-established and the feed-through from the new dam installed. It all worked and looked very fitting.

Parks Victoria decided though, that to have a running waterwheel on site with no one watching it was too dangerous, so a chain lock was placed on the wheel to be taken off only when one of us was on site to keep an eye on it.

5. The picket fence around the fenced Caretakers Site was damaged in part and was repaired.
6. It was felt some display signs were needed to tell visitors a bit about the history of the kiln and the accommodation huts. Funding was received to create two signs, one next to the kiln and one in the caretakers compound. Two more signs were eventually placed on the Waterchannel Track and another one in 2008 at the site of the portable steel kiln on Tonimbuk Road.
7. Three display windows were installed on the open side of the Big Shed, again to give visitors some ideas on the activities now going on here. One covers the Friends Group activities, one is for the history of the site and one for general conservation activity in the area.



Other Activities

1. Revegetation became a dominant project over the years - first around the kiln site itself, then further afield, with bushwalking and track guidance developing. The participation of the local schools of Gembrook, Cockatoo and Hoddles Creek was encouraged. Funding support from Local Councils, Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water covered the expenses. We even had one funded by an environmental group in Canberra.



2. The idea of having a Kurth Kiln Festival seemed a good way to



promote the historic site and our activities. The first one took place on the weekend of April 13 and 14 in 2002 and was called "Beyond the Big Smoke".

The idea came from Ray Boatman, President of the National Trust Australia, Dandenong Ranges Branch.

It was a huge success and the Friends Group decided to

make a Kurth Kiln Heritage Festival in autumn an annual event. With the financial support of local council the festival has gone from strength to strength with over 100 volunteers participating each year.



3. One major development for us was the creation of a List of Cultural Artefacts found on site. All items were given a number and recorded on the computer, including items left behind by the Forest Commission who used the site after the war. The activity extended over several years and close to



1500 items are now registered. A display wall was set-up in the Big Shed to allow visitors to appreciate the collection. Of course, we needed power to operate the computers on site and Parks Victoria came to the party, installing a two-panel solar power supply, which has helped us a lot over the years.

The latest addition to the list of artefacts was a collection

of six so-called Gas Producers donated to us and housed in a special enclosure back in the walkway near the kiln.



The Enclosure was funded by Parks Victoria and the Information Display Panels by the Victorian Heritage Department.

How we came by the Gas Producers is a nice little story in itself. We had been thinking about how we could demonstrate to our visitors what the charcoal produced in the kiln was actually used for and how this was done. One day a chap from RoyalAuto magazine was looking around the kiln site and said “this would actually make a nice story for our magazine”. I told him that we were looking for a couple of Gas Producers to complete the picture, and asked him if it was possible to put a little note at the bottom of his story about our activities, asking the readers if anyone had one of those old Gas Producers still lying around their property, would they mind donating it to us? We couldn't pay for it, but we would acknowledge the donation in the display.

Would you believe it! We had 20 offers from all over Victoria. We selected six different ones and completed the enclosure. It has been a very successful addition to our historic display.



“Amongst Friends: Caring for our Heritage and Promoting Public Awareness” was published in 2011.

4. In 2008 the Heritage Department of Victoria included Kurth Kiln in their list of Historic Sites in Victoria. It is now an official Heritage Site and no changes are allowed to be made without Department approval.

5. Ron Thornton was living in the Caretakers Cottage when we started at Kurth Kiln and was



Ron Thornton

considered the Unofficial Caretaker of the site. He had his own little vegetable garden and immediately joined the group as a very creative member. Unfortunately he passed away the following year. To commemorate Ron's activities Meinhard Holtz suggested naming the new walking track he was planning North of the Tomahawk Creek after him. The Thornton Walking Track was completed in 2006, running from the little Picnic Ground next to the Lake eastwards 1km to Camp Track, with a new bridge back over the Tomahawk Creek for a return circuit via Soldiers Road to Kurth Kiln. Six Interpretation Boards were placed along the way to tell the story of the



natural environment and history. Construction was paid for by Melbourne Water.

6. One way or another Ranger Ralph Angelico was involved in, and very supportive of all of our activities. One little story I have often told before, was when we had a blocked drain, and debating on how to fix it, perhaps blow it out? “Hang on a minute” Ralph shouted, “I’ll be back in half an hour”. He came back with the Parks Victoria Fire Fighting truck and within 15 minutes the blocked drain was cleared and working again.



Ranger Ralph Angelico, as he appeared in issue 10 of The Kiln, June 2004

Ralph encouraged us to participate in a Friends Group Best Photo Display Competition in Kallista in October 2002.

We prepared two large display panels, covering Kurth Kiln History and our activities to promote it and, would you believe it, we won first prize! These two panels are still on display at meetings and events.



Ralph retired in 2012 and we miss him very much.

7. There are some 100km of Bush Walking Tracks in Kurth Kiln Regional Park and many visiting groups go for extended walks there. We give Guided Tours of the Kurth Kiln site at every opportunity, but we also look for new Motivating Ideas.



After the Fires - a Visit to Bunyip State Park

Parks Victoria, Gembrook conducted a tour of Bunyip State Park for interested volunteers on 29 June. Most of the Park has been closed since 60% of it was burned by the devastating fires which began on 1 March. PV wished to show concerned volunteers its condition, and discuss possible involvement in the ongoing recovery.



The tour was hosted by the Area Chief Ranger Jack Dinkgreve and Senior Ranger Andy Musgrove. A number of Friends of Kurth Kiln attended, along with other Friends Groups, bushwalkers, four-wheel drivers, horse-riders, and others who use and volunteer in the Park.

We drove through some severely burned parts of the Park, and took a short walk along a section of the button-grass track, where the button-grass tussocks are putting up new green shoots, and the trees are fuzzy with epicormic growth. One section of this track was deeply dug out, as it has been necessary to excavate and remove soil contaminated by ash where the treated pine boardwalk burnt.



Jack and Andy explained that the Park has been closed for safety reasons, while roads are being repaired and potential hazards removed. It will remain closed for some time longer, until the vegetation has recovered somewhat, as the bare ground is very fragile, and vulnerable to any off-track traffic.

The group returned to the Gembrook CFA, where Jack and Andy answered questions and exhibited maps of the fire area, showing the severity and spread of the fire, and some recent fire history.

Kurth Kiln: Culture and Heritage

A Report by Jane Morton Colbert

As part of an assignment for Charles Sturt University, Jane Morton Colbert has written a broad-ranging and informative essay on the culture and heritage of Kurth Kiln. Jane has researched the area's indigenous history, European settlement, gold-mining, timber-harvesting and charcoal production, through to the Kiln's current status as a heritage site within a Regional Park.

She demonstrates the heritage values of the Kiln, describing the construction and operation of the Kiln in its historical context, the Kiln and its environment as it is at present, and the attributes which have led to its recognition and preservation, and which will (hopefully) ensure that it is maintained into the future.

Jane says *"The historic value of Kurth Kiln ... includes heritage of aesthetic, scientific and social value associated with historic phases and activities. This quiet and peaceful place is significant for its long-term, diverse and active human history which includes indigenous utilisation, gold mining, timber cutting, innovative charcoal production, forestry operations and now continues as a campsite for recreation activities including hiking and horse-riding and as a destination of historical interest."*



A link to Jane's essay can be found on our website under 'About' :
<https://www.friendsofcurthkiln.org.au/Jane-Morton-Colberts-Kurth-Kiln.pdf>

Amazon Frogbit in the lake

"What?" you ask. Read on:

Plant Ecologist Fiona Sutton contacted us in May, telling us about an unexpected plant she had spotted in the lake in front of the Kiln.

"I was visiting Kurth Kiln on the weekend for a run and while I was there I found a plant I did not recognise. I took some photos and a sample and have since had it identified thanks to some of the best Botanists in the State: Graeme Lorimer, Neville Walsh, Val Stajsic, Damien Cook and Matt Dell.

*The reason it took so many people to confirm its identity is because it was a new weed species record for the state. It's been identified as *Limnobium laevigatum*, Amazon Frogbit, a darn good floating aquatic weed that has been listed as a State prohibited weed in NSW, but unfortunately hasn't been assessed in Victoria so can still be sold in the aquarium industry.*

We've notified the Weedspotters program and Melbourne Water so hopefully an eradication program will commence soon."



Shortly after this discovery, when Ursula was walking in the Park she encountered a group from Melbourne Water removing the weed from the dam. They also searched downstream and upstream in case the weed had spread.



Apparently Amazon Frogbit is a popular aquarium waterweed, and we speculate that someone may have dumped the contents of their unwanted aquarium into the creek.

Amazon Frogbit is a tropical plant, and although it is spreading in New South Wales, it had been assumed that the cold weather would prevent it from being a problem in Victoria.

However the population in the dam on Tomahawk creek was thriving, so experts are hoping that the quick action has halted this infestation at least.

Sixty Years Ago



Long-time Hoddles Creek local, Phillip Coulson, attended this year's Kurth Kiln Heritage Festival as a member of the Hoddles Creek Fire Brigade.

After talking to Alfred about his long association with the area, he sent the photo at left, of his family at Kurth Kiln circa 1960.

Phil said "I am the young boy in the background."

Friends of Kurth Kiln Monthly Meeting and Working Bee

The Friends of Kurth Kiln meet at the Kiln on the second Saturday of each month at 10 am.

The Kiln is located on Soldiers Road, close to its intersection with Beenak Road, in Kurth Kiln Regional Park near Gembrook, Victoria.

Friends of Kurth Kiln welcome new members Daniel Boekel and Daniel Browne.

Dates for the remainder of 2019 are:

13 July
10 August
14 September
12 October
9 November
14 December

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Postage

To